

Home Education Guide for Catholic Families in PA



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Please note: All italicized text is quoted from the Home Education Law of Pennsylvania (Act 169 of 1988) or other laws. The Home Education Law is contained within the Public School Code. All Section references relate to sections of the Public School Code of 1949 of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

WHO, WHY AND HOW

Is homeschooling legal in Pennsylvania?

Yes. The current law in Pennsylvania is Act 169 of 1988 (also known as Section 1327.1 of the Public School Code of 1949).

Who usually chooses home education and why do they choose it?

The characteristics of the homeschool parent are as diverse as any other population group. Every socio-economic group, ethnic background, race, educational background, etc., is represented. Parents and children with all sorts of medical conditions are home educating as well.

The circumstances are just as diverse. Some parents are bringing their children home from an institutional school, whereas others have always educated their children at home. Parents bring their children home from elementary school, junior high, and high school (some even late in the student's senior year of high school). Parents will begin home educating before or at the beginning of the new school year, or bring their children home from an institutional school at any time from just after the first days of school till just before the end of the school year. Families may switch out of or back into institutional schools at any time of the year. There is no one kind of homeschool parent and no ideal time to begin homeschooling.

Why do Catholic parents educate their children at home with Catholic schools available?

Besides the fact that statistics prove that children learn best in a one-on-one customized environment, Catholic schools are not available or affordable to all families. Generally, they also do not have the facilities/programs/resources to educate children with special needs or exceptional needs. There are children who are easily distracted by other students or are unable to concentrate properly in a school environment. Regardless, even where the Catholic schools are excellent and could meet the needs of the student, the Catholic Church teaches that parents are the primary educators of their children, and parents should be the first choice educators, not the "last resort."

What are the benefits of home education?

♥ Children who are home educated acquire self-esteem and self-confidence that is best accomplished outside of the influence of the peer pressure found in schools.

♥ Parents can appropriately challenge a student or give extra attention to other areas making sure that the student does not "fall through the cracks".

♥ Those children who are easily distracted by other students in the classroom can thrive in the familiar environment of their home.

♥ Parents can make their children's education come alive through appropriate field trips, library resources, community resources and, where appropriate, Internet and/or computer resources.

♥ Parents are able to train and educate their children in their religious faith, values and beliefs without the outside interference of those who do not share that faith, those values or beliefs. The family's right to privacy of faith also is maintained.

♥ Home education allows the flexibility for parents and students whose travel, work and activity schedules are difficult to accommodate with the traditional school year or traditional school day.

♥ Students and/or parents with health challenges can make use of the July 1-June 30 school year to complete their 180 days without the stress of the traditional schedule or exposure to additional health risks and concerns.

♥ And the list goes on.

What do children like about being educated at home?

♥ Recess time can be used to ride their own bikes, play on their own swing sets, and use other family belongings that they miss out on when at school.

♥ Parents can bring the education to life with field trips and learning opportunities involving their science, history, and other subjects that are not available to most other students. Even family vacations can revolve around the academics or it may be scheduled off season.

♥ School projects become long-lasting possessions and not shared with a group or left at school.

♥ Families who move frequently find that their children experience ease of adjustment if they have continuity with their academics. Making new friends is much easier than re-establishing themselves with a new teacher and school as well.

♥ Parents can choose to use the same curriculum, activities, etc., for each student in the family or customize for each child as necessary.

♥ Students can use their own musical, art, and sports interests as their musical, art and physical education courses.

♥ Many other interests can become part of their academics, such as home renovations can become an industrial technology class.

♥ Children can learn at their own pace without pressure of comparison to that of other students.

♥ Siblings get to bond with each other, instead of being separated during the school day.

♥ Children love the fact that once they put in a school day, many times there is no need for homework as that was done during school hours.

♥ Children also can tailor their school day to their biological clock. Students who just cannot concentrate on subjects like math or science first thing in the morning can adjust their schedule to cover these subjects in the afternoon or evening, if necessary.

♥ And the list goes on.

What about socialization?

Some parents bring their children home to educate them because of the negative aspects of socialization in the schools (cruelty, peer pressure, drugs, violence, etc.). Parents and their children do not find that being outside of an institutional school is a negative. It helps them to develop and choose positive social outlets and social habits as well as to be more discriminating and selective as adults do. Home educated students can use community sports, homeschool co-ops, family events, dance/gymnastics/art and other classes, music lessons, and much more as opportunities for positive socialization.

Those children who are easily distracted by other children in the classroom especially benefit from keeping their academic and social activities separate. However, those home educated students who have returned to an institutional school or gone on to jobs or college have proven that they tend to be much more mature, self-confident, well spoken, and capable of handling any social situation than their institutionally-educated peers. This may be because mature adults are influencing them rather than immature peers.

An education in a family atmosphere exposes the student to real life socialization as the Domestic Church is more representative of the real world, multi-aged society than the artificial, age-limited environment of a school. Besides, if a school focuses on the demands of its curriculum, there should be very little time for socialization.

Can home education work for families where there is no family harmony?

This is a very sad situation; however, this is an excellent reason to bring your children home for their education. Working through times tables, algebra, chemistry, religion and all other subjects from a Catholic perspective can work to rebuild the foundation of respect, love and unity within the entire family. Home education can be a bonding experience.

Many, many families have found that by regularly sprinkling their homes and family members with holy water, praying the family Rosary, frequent use of the Sacrament of Confession, and taking the children to Mass at times other than Sundays and holydays can calm the overactive child, bring discipline to the home/classroom, show children that their parents love them more than they ever realized, and open formerly closed minds and hearts to the love of learning and family.

Yes, home education can work and is usually what repairs and restores those strained family relationships.

Can home education work if my spouse is not supportive?

An unsupportive spouse can undermine things by bringing that negative attitude into all other areas of family life because so much is educational and academic in every day life.

It is usually best to have both parents on board and supportive, but often this is not the case. Often one or both parents may even fear the unknown and wonder if somehow another educational option might be better. However, if the children are thriving at home, then usually this is still the best option. Find another home educator who has experienced similar situations or grade levels and “lived to talk about it.” That individual can often assist you in working through the maze of confusion that you perceive you are traveling through at such a time. Too often the mother has met other women who home educate, but the father has not met or discussed this with other men. In such a case, it is important to meet that need for him to become supportive.

Does the unsupportive spouse worry that home education will tax your health or result in meals and housework being ignored or that there may be no energy and time left to give to him/her? Discussion and identifying the specific objection is the first step. Placing trust in the one who feels called to do this is the second step. Realizing that everybody has an occasional bad day in all areas of life may be the third step. But the important thing is this. Remember that if God calls you to do this, He will not let you down. Otherwise, He will be permitting one of His plans to fail, and that is certainly not the case.

If the unsupportive spouse is the one expected to do the home educating, then you may need to put a lot of prayer and discussion into things first. Find out your spouse’s objections and how those objections can be overcome. Usually those concerns are unnecessary worries. Often attending the Catholic Homeschool Conference and Curriculum Fair in Harrisburg each April is a tremendous way to meet other families, review curriculum, get answers to questions from families who have worked through the same issues, and hear speakers who will address those concerns and uplift as well.

How much time does it take in your day to teach your children at home?

This will vary depending on the age, grade level, number of children, and abilities of the students being taught. The younger student’s courses are more labor intensive for the parent as these children may not be able to read directions or do many things without parental involvement. As the child grows, he/she can become a more independent learner. However, depending on the subject and the child, parents do adjust their availability, involvement, and teaching style with the needs of the older student. One-on-one tutoring is a far more efficient method of educating children. Many families do group children together for gym, art or music and any other appropriate courses.

Home education does not require unnecessary busy work like the ‘seatwork’ done in schools to occupy one group of students while the teacher works with another group of students. It also is time-efficient in that the student can have a personalized method of instruction, testing, etc., rather than accommodating his/her peers. Therefore, parents and students alike learn over a period of days or weeks how much is enough. Younger students, who would have lengthy recesses each day in an institutional school, will tend to be done more quickly as would bright students. Those with procrastinating tendencies, slower learners, or slower readers will take longer than their counterparts even in the upper grades. However, the higher the grade level, the more demanding the curriculum will be and the more time it will take the student to complete his/her work. It is important though to make sure that academics takes priority over after-school activities, community sports, and part-time jobs.

Parents who teach their children at home find that there are ‘teachable moments’ at all times of the day and wherever they go, but the children are far more receptive in an environment where learning and striving for their best is considered the ‘cool’ thing to do.

Children and parents often find that many of their favorite activities (ballet and gymnastics classes, music lessons, sports activities, etc.) can be extensions of their school day. Families who prefer to have Dad teach some courses in the evening or on weekends have the flexibility to do that too.

Are there any legal restrictions as to who can home educate?

The law only states the following requirements for a parent to home educate:

- 1) *“the parent or guardian or such person having legal custody of the child or children... shall be responsible for the provision of instruction,”* Section 1327.1(a)
- 2) *“provided that such person has a high school diploma or its equivalent.”* Section 1327.1(a)
- 3) *“all adults living in the home and persons having legal custody of a child or children in a home education program [shall] not have been convicted of the criminal offenses enumerated in subsection (e) of section 111 within five years immediately preceding the date of the affidavit.”* Section 1327.1(1)

Parents who would home educate their children typically are not the type of parents who would have committed such crimes as referred to in #3 above. However, we list them below for your information:

Chapter 25 (relating to criminal homicide).
 Section 2702 (relating to aggravated assault).
 Section 2709 (relating to harassment and stalking).
 Section 2901 (relating to kidnapping).
 Section 2902 (relating to unlawful restraint).
 Section 3121 (relating to rape).
 Section 3122.1 (relating to statutory sexual assault).
 Section 3123 (relating to involuntary deviate sexual intercourse).
 Section 3124.1 (relating to sexual assault).
 Section 3125 (relating to aggravated indecent assault).
 Section 3126 (relating to indecent assault).
 Section 3127 (relating to indecent exposure).
 Section 4302 (relating to incest).
 Section 4303 (relating to concealing death of child).
 Section 4304 (relating to endangering welfare of children).
 Section 4305 (relating to dealing in infant children).
 A felony offense under section 5902(b) (relating to prostitution and related offenses).
 Section 5903(c) or (d) (relating to obscene and other sexual materials and performances).
 Section 6301 (relating to corruption of minors).
 Section 6312 (relating to sexual abuse of children).

How do I know if I should educate my children at home?

If you meet the requirements above and if God is calling you to homeschool, you will know it. It just will not leave you alone and will nag at you until you do it. You might also find that you are doing more and more supplemental work at home with your children. If you are called to home educate, trust in God that He will not let you fail at His plan for your children.

Are parents adequately qualified to educate their children?

As Catholics we believe that we receive graces from every Sacrament. The Sacrament of Matrimony gives parents all of the graces that they need to do all that they are called to do both as a spouse and as a parent. Whether that would be dealing with colic, potty training, learning manners at the table, cursive handwriting, basic to advanced math, the sciences, sacramental preparation or the deeper matters of the Catholic faith, God has given parents sufficient graces to do it all. Just as parents do not know whether or not they have the graces to handle teething until their baby has reached that stage, they do not always realize that they have the graces to handle elementary or secondary education until they are in the midst of it and actually see it working.

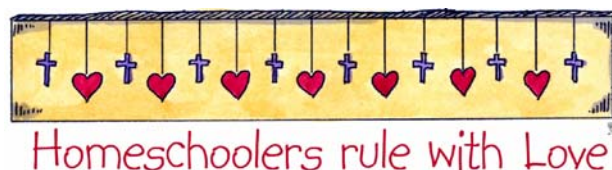
How do I know that I will be able to handle the older grades?

Every couple should reassess each year what God is calling them to do with regard to their child's education. If God is calling you to continue or begin home education, as a very active Superintendent of your homeschool, God will make sure that everything falls into place in just the right timing.

When one young mother thought her husband wanted her to go back to work and put their children in daycare, her husband said, "If I would have wanted someone else to raise our children, I would have married her." In the same way, if God wanted only certified teachers to teach children, He would have given all or proportionately more of His children to *them*.

Just like the saying that "the apple does not fall far from the tree," the chances are that your children will learn similarly to the manner in which you and/or your spouse learn things. If you have some idea of what it takes for you or your spouse to learn something, then you have an advantage over someone else who does not know you or your spouse on an academic level.

The Holy Bible says, "Parents [not teachers] train up your children in the way they should go." Additionally, God made the first homeschool parents (Adam and Eve) before He made the first students. Had He found it necessary or essential, He could have made the teachers, the school district, or the village before He made the first students. This fact is just as relevant today.



It does not take a village to educate a child, but it does take an entire school system. Except in those cases where the father is the principal educator of the children, the ideal school system would be structured like this:

Superintendent—Almighty God

Principal—Dad

Teacher—Mom

Teacher's aides—the parents' and children's guardian angels

Support staff—the parents' and children's patron saints and all others who intercede for you in prayer.

This "team effort" can result only in the best education that can ever be provided to the children you love and in whom you have a vested interest in becoming successful in life.

NOTIFYING THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Can my local school board, school district or anyone else place a limit on the number of students who are allowed to be home educated in a given year?

Absolutely not! The Pennsylvania Constitution in Article II B. Section 14 states, "*The General Assembly [the state House and Senate] shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth.*" However, the state Constitution does not compel parents to choose that or any other educational option. The state Constitution, the Public School Code and the Home Education Law contain absolutely no restriction of parental choice in educational options. The choice is strictly up to the parent(s). The local school district cannot restrict or deny a right provided by law. The Home Education Law provides parents the right to choose homeschooling for their children.

Can the school board, school district or anyone else institute a cut off date by which students may begin home education?

Absolutely not! The Home Education Law states that the affidavit must be filed "*prior to the commencement [beginning] of the home education program and annually thereafter on August 1...*" Therefore, the first year that a student is home educated (or the first year that paperwork is submitted), a parent or legal guardian can file the affidavit at any time before *or* during the school year as long as it is prior to beginning to home educate. The law clearly allows parents the option to choose to begin home education for the first time (or to resume home education after attending an institutional school) at any time of the year. After that first year, the affidavit *must* be filed on or before August 1.

If the student is attending a school at the time when the parent chooses to begin homeschooling, we recommend not pulling a student out of school before the affidavit is submitted. Any days which are considered illegal absences from school can be open for charges of truancy which can bring fines of \$300 per day. Therefore, it is best to leave the child in the school until the day after the affidavit has been received by the district.

When can I begin homeschooling?

You may begin at any time of the school year. If the student has attended school during part of the school year, you will need to document the number of days required to complete the 180 required days after counting all days of attendance and days of excused absences. In other words:

180 days - days of attendance so far - days of excused absences = the number of days left to record

Who has to know that I will be homeschooling my child(ren)?

You must file an Home Education Affidavit (and objectives) with the local public school district superintendent under the following conditions:

- 1) the student currently is in or in the past has attended grades 1 or higher in any public, nonpublic, charter or cyber charter school;
- 2) the student has been homeschooled in the past but will be 8 as of the first day of school in your district or within the first 14 days after that first day of school for that school year.

You do not have to file an affidavit with the superintendent under the following conditions:

- 1) you have received written notification from the district that your child may attend kindergarten or kindergarten orientation. This is sometimes the first communication that families receive from the school district. If this occurs, you may simply notify the district by phone or mail that your child will be

homeschooled and will not be attending the school for kindergarten. You may tell them that you will begin doing the home education paperwork once the student has reached the age of compulsory attendance (which is 8 years of age at the present time) if home education continues till that point.

- 2) the student is under the age of 8 and has only attended grades up to and including kindergarten in the local public school or any other school; and,
- 3) the student is age 17 or older. Once a student is 17 years of age, he/she is beyond the compulsory attendance age. Therefore, filing with the district is optional.

If my child will turn 8 during the school year, how do I know if filing is necessary?

Section 1304 of the Public School Code defines the ‘age of beginners’ as follows:

“The admission of beginners to the public schools shall be confined to the first two weeks of the annual school term in districts operating on an annual promotion basis,... The term “beginners,” as used in this section, shall mean any child that should enter the lowest grade of the primary school or the lowest primary class above the kindergarten level.” Therefore, if your child will be 8 years of age as of the first day of school or within 14 days after the first day of school in that district in that year, then paperwork must be filed for that student. If the student will turn 8 at any time after that, then paperwork for that student is not filed until the following school year.

What if my public school district wants me to send my affidavit to someone else at the school district?

The Home Education Law only provides that beginning and end-of-year documentation be submitted to the superintendent of the local public school district. It does not provide for the superintendent to designate that someone else (director of curriculum, school psychologist, building principal) may receive that information. Therefore, you are always right in addressing the documentation directly to the superintendent. In other areas of the Public School Code, it is phrased as “the superintendent or his designee,” but such is not the case for the Home Education Law.

Should I notify anyone else of our decision to homeschool?

Nonpublic, charter or cyber-charter schools:

- 1) If your child is being withdrawn from one of these schools during the school year, you may notify them at the end of the last day of school that your student will not be returning so that they know your student is not truant from their institution.
- 2) If the child will not be returning the following school year, there is no need to notify the school.

Public school:

- 1) If your student is being withdrawn from a public school, the affidavit and objectives are the only notification that the district needs.

You do not under any circumstances need to explain or justify your decision. That is the private decision and determination between you and your spouse. The opinion or agreement of others is not necessary. You do not need to justify your reason or decision to anyone but your spouse and God. If you have been dissatisfied with some other educational option, your comments or complaints usually will do very little to rectify the situation at this point. Instead, it could cause further bad feelings and stress for all involved. Often the decision to home educate was a complicated one involving more than one reason that God used to direct you into His plan for your children. Stating that you are reassured that this is God’s plan for your child(ren) at this time is usually sufficient.

If I am withdrawing my children from another school, what will they do with the student records that they have on file?

No prior school records are to be sent to the public school from other school options unless your student is being enrolled in the public school. Home educated students *are not* public school students nor are then enrolled in the school. Each school should have a system of storing or archiving these records. The public school has no right to your student’s academic records unless the student attended the public school in the past; thus, any other school that your child attended in the past has no reason to forward your child’s records to the public school. The only paperwork necessary for home education to begin is the affidavit and objectives.

Who is the ‘supervisor’ of the home education program?

Please note that this *is not* the person who evaluates the student at the end of the year. “Supervisor” *does not* refer to someone who is an outside observer. Typically the ‘supervisor’ is one of the student’s parents. The law defines the supervisor to be *“the parent or guardian or such person having legal custody of the child or children*

who shall be responsible for the provision of instruction, provided that such person has a high school diploma or its equivalent.” Section 1327.1(a)

Do I need a separate affidavit for each child?

No. There are various formats of affidavits, and you should be able to find one to handle all of your children of reporting age on one form. One such form is available at www.catholichomeschoolpa.org/hsforms.html.

My district has their own affidavit. Can I use that?

If the content of the affidavit is the same, it may be used. Some school districts also will request that parents sign a particular affidavit with additional provisions such as denying their right to special education services or agreeing to home visits. The Home Education Law does not permit the school district to dictate additional provisions to be included in the affidavit. Parents may submit the regular affidavit without these additional provisions. You are not required to use such an affidavit nor can the district hold your home education program hostage until you agree to such provisions.

Is the affidavit all that I need to file with the public school district?

No. You must also file a list of at least one objective for each subject your student is required to take. There must be a list of objectives for each child who is old enough to be included in the affidavit.

If you have a student in your household who has been identified as special needs (not gifted), then a special needs certified teacher or licensed psychologist must look over what you expect to do with your child and write a letter simply stating that the program has been reviewed and that what you will be using is appropriate for the child. That individual’s letter must be included with the affidavit as well. Although not stated in the law, this is presumed to be done annually at the beginning of the year only.

Must I show proof of my high school diploma to the public school district?

No. This reference is written in the law two paragraphs before the list of items to be submitted to the district in or with the affidavit. There is no reference to this repeated in that section either. The Pennsylvania Department of Education has stated that this is not necessary. Please contact us if you need a copy of that documentation.

The requirement that the parent must have a high school diploma or a GED is mentioned two paragraphs prior to the list of information which must be submitted to the district. The Home Education Law does not even state that the parent must attest to this in the affidavit; therefore, it should not be required. The PA Department of Education has also stated that the copy of the diploma is not required to be submitted. However, it is up to the parent as to whether or not he/she would like to add such an attestation to the affidavit. A parent who is not qualified to home educate (one who does not have a high school diploma or GED) should not be submitting an affidavit. Submission of the affidavit *should be* the means of notifying the district that the parent is qualified to home educate under the law.

What if I do not have a high school diploma or a GED?

If one parent does not have a high school diploma or GED, then the other spouse may be the supervisor of record. If your spouse also does not have a high school diploma or GED, then home education is not an option for the students in that family. However, this has motivated some parents to get their GED.

My school district is requesting a copy of my latest pay stub, utility bill receipts, proof of residency, the child’s birth certificate, the child’s social security number, and other documentation. Must I submit that with the affidavit?

Absolutely not! The only paperwork required by law is the affidavit and the objectives in order to begin home education. The other documents that you mentioned are never required to be submitted to the school district in order to home educate. If the district presses you on this matter, contact Sarah Pearce at the Pennsylvania Department of Education to report this.

My school district says that I must complete an enrollment form for my children. Is that true?

Absolutely not! Your children will not be public school students and they should not be getting reimbursed as if they are attending the school. Do not complete the form and, if the district presses you on this matter, contact

Sarah Pearce at the PA Department of Education to report this. The only information that the district is required by law to have is stated in Section 1327.1(b)(1):

- 1) *“the name of the supervisor of the home education program who shall be responsible for the provision of instruction”*
- 2) *“the name and age [not the grade level] of each child [of reporting age] who shall participate in the home education program”*
- 3) *“the address and telephone number of the home education program site”*
- 4) *“that such subjects as required by law are offered in the English language,”*
- 5) *“that the child has been immunized in accordance with the provisions of section 1303(a) [which also provides for a medical exemption or an exemption based on a strong moral or ethical conviction similar to a religious belief] and has received the health and medical services required for the students of the child’s age or grade level”*
- 6) *“that the home education program shall comply with the provisions of [the Home Education Law]”*
- 7) *The affidavit shall contain a certification... that the supervisor, all adults living in the home and persons having legal custody of a child or children in a home education program have not been convicted of the criminal offenses enumerated in subsection (e) of section 111 within five years immediately preceding the date of the affidavit.”*

The law states that the *“the notarized affidavit shall be satisfactory evidence”* of these statements since falsely swearing before a notary carries its own penalties.

What if the school nurse requests copies of my children’s records of immunization and health or medical service?

First of all, the Home Education Law only provides for documentation to be submitted to the public school superintendent, not the school nurse. However, there are districts which make these requests. The Home Education Law states that evidence of these or the appropriate medical or religious exemptions is satisfied by the sworn affidavit. The Law states, *“evidence that the child has been immunized in accordance with the provisions of section 1303(a) and has received the health and medical services required for students of the child’s age or grade level in Article XIV; and that the home education program shall comply with the provisions of this section and that the notarized affidavit shall be satisfactory evidence thereof.”* Section 1327.1(b)(1) [Emphasis ours] Therefore, unless the district is accusing the parent of perjury under oath before a notary, this should not be necessary. Some districts are concerned about audits by the PA Department of Education where such information must be kept on file for their own students, but your students are not enrolled in their school. It is also wise to consult your U.S. Senator and/or U.S. Representative on the affects of the federal HIPAA legislation on the privacy of your students’ medical records.



Another inappropriate but occasional form requested of homeschool parents is a survey detailing the pregnancy, infancy, thumbsucking, method of feeding, toilet training, etc., of the student. Any such additional forms or surveys beyond the affidavit and objectives *are not* required to be completed by the parent or student.

When should I submit the affidavit and objectives?

They must be submitted prior to beginning to homeschool. You may begin home educating over the summer or at any time after the district receives them. Therefore, it is recommended that you send them by certified mail/return receipt requested in order to have verification of the date that the district receives the documents. This also eliminates any conflicts with the district should documentation be misplaced and found at a later date.

What if I want to begin homeschooling during the school year?

The same advice applies. Do not withdraw your child from school until after the documentation is received by the district. Otherwise, the student could be considered to have an illegal absence. After three illegal absences, you can be charged with truancy and fined \$300/day if found guilty. Therefore, it is ideal to have all documentation complete and books acquired before withdrawing your child out of school.

Can my objectives be rejected?

No. The Home Education Law states, “*The required outline of proposed education objectives shall not be utilized by the superintendent in determining if the home education program is out of compliance with this section and section 1327.1.*” Section 1327.1(b)(1) In most instances if a superintendent claims that the objectives have been rejected, it is often because the family has missed something such as ‘safety education to include instruction in fire prevention.’ However, if everything has been included that is required, then it is often resolved by quoting the above section of the law to the district.

Is there a specific format for the objectives?

The law dictates no format. Therefore, the parent should be free to determine the format. The only requirement is that the required subjects be covered. Religion is not a required subject according to state law. Thus, parents are not obligated to divulge that information to the district.

Does this mean that the superintendent cannot require specific assignments or activities in my homeschool?

Yes. The Home Education Law has certain *subject* requirements but *no content* requirements. Content is at the sole discretion of the parent. In the high school years, the district also cannot dictate which years the student does the required 3 math, 3 social studies, and 3 science courses. The parent and/or full-service curriculum provider will determine that.

Since I am Catholic, can I submit the affidavit and end-of-year paperwork to the local Catholic school?

No. The Home Education Law requires that you submit this paperwork to the local public school superintendent because he/she has the authority to enforce the truancy laws. Therefore, the public school superintendent must be notified of students who are legally being home educated in order to establish who is truant and who is not.

Who ‘supervises’ the student’s education?

As defined in the Home Education Law under Section 1327.1(a), the parent who signs the affidavit is the supervisor of the home education program. No one else has the right to oversee or have input into the day-to-day activities or content of the home education program. Since most home education programs constitute the religious education of the student, the local public school obviously should not have the right of oversight or input into such religious instruction of the student.

CURRICULUM

How do I get started with homeschooling?

- First, it is best to determine whether you will begin home educating mid-year or at the beginning of the following school year.
- Then choose the full-service curriculum provider or curriculum you will be using. Many families choose a full-service curriculum provider at least in the beginning to gain confidence and for various other reasons.
- Next, if using a full-service curriculum provider, begin the paperwork, testing, and order the books for your student.
- Ideally, you should have your books handy to write up your objectives to submit with the affidavit to the local public school superintendent.
- Finally, submit the affidavit and objectives and begin home educating at any time after the district has received that documentation.

Who pays for the curriculum of the home-educated student?

The parents bear all costs of books, supplies, computers, etc., for the students if public school books are not used. The PA Constitution in Article III E Section 30 states, “*No appropriation shall be made to any charitable or education institution not under the absolute control of the Commonwealth, other than normal schools established by law for the professional training of teachers for the public schools of the State, except by a vote of two-thirds of all the members of each House.*” [Emphasis ours] A home education program is not under absolute control of the Commonwealth; therefore, the parents bear the burden of paying the cost.

However, the Home Education Law does provide the option to parents of receiving public school materials. The law clearly states, “*The school district of residence shall, at the request of the supervisor [parent], lend to the home education program copies of the school district’s planned courses, textbooks and other curriculum materials appropriate to the student’s age and grade level.*” Parents are, however, limited in this instance to the choice of

books (non-religious, sometimes politically correct and based on evolution instead of creation) in use by the district. The district is not required to provide books to the student that are not in use by its own students. School districts clearly are obligated to provide books upon request. The PA Department of Education (PDE) encourages districts to fill such requests in a timely manner. However, for the following reason, many Catholic parents will not request public school books.

"Religion must not be taught to youth only during certain hours, but the entire system of education must be permeated with the sense of Christian piety. If this is lacking, if this Holy Spirit does not penetrate and inflame the souls of teacher and pupil, small benefit will be derived from any other sort of education; instead damage will be done...

"A wide knowledge should go hand in hand with care for spiritual progress; religion must permeate and direct every branch of knowledge whatever be its nature, and by its sweetness and majesty must make so great an impression on the minds of youth as to be an incitement to better things.

"Therefore, it is the duty of parents to make every effort to prevent any invasion of their rights in this matter, and to make absolutely sure that the education of their children remain under their own control in keeping with their Christian duty, and above all to refuse to send them to those schools in which there is danger of imbibing the deadly poison of impiety..."

Militantis Ecclesiae, Pope Leo XIII

Do home-educated students receive a break or waiver on school taxes?

No. All property owners including senior citizens, parents of non-public school students, and homeschooling parents must pay these in full.

Where can I find Catholic materials for my children?

Please see the list at www.catholichomeschoolpa.org/curriculum.html. There is contact information as well as links to their websites on that page. We suggest that you begin by contacting these curriculum providers for literature on their programs. Many parents who are new to home education find it easier to use the full-service of a curriculum provider because the tests and lesson plans are prepared for you already by most of the curriculum providers listed. They also offer telephone consultation and other services as well.

You can expect a lot of help from the full-service curriculum providers if you let them know as specifically as possible what your concern or difficulty, if any, might be. These full-service curriculum providers are also the best sources to begin with for choosing to purchase curriculum. If you need to see curriculum in advance, this statewide network sponsors a Catholic Homeschool Conference and Curriculum Fair in Harrisburg each year in April where materials from full-service curriculum providers and a large variety of other Catholic materials are displayed by the schools' personnel or representatives and available for sale.

Many of the Protestant sources available either do not address things from a Catholic perspective or are blatantly anti-Catholic. Parents and children who begin using Catholic materials after using secular or Protestant texts, workbooks, or lesson plans cannot believe what they were missing and usually get sold onto using more and more Catholic texts as time goes on.

Am I required to have an official 'schoolroom' in my home and must it pass inspection by anyone?

The Home Education Law does not impose any requirements on the parent regarding the educational environment. Home education is 'education in the home.' It is not 'school in the home.' Additionally, the district has no right to search your home or inspect it for such items as blackboard, desks, or any other educational equipment. It is your right to determine whether school is done at a desk, dining room table, picnic table, or any other location that you find suitable. Since you are typically teaching one-on-one, a blackboard may not be necessary. However, it and other 'school-type' items may certainly be purchased for your family use if you so choose.

Can home-educated students have access to vo-tech/vocational-technical/career & technology schools?

Yes. Section 502 of the Public School Code states, "*No pupil shall be refused admission to the courses in these additional schools or departments, by reason of the fact that his elementary or academic education is being or has been received in a school other than a public school.*"

Can home-educated students take classes at the public school or Catholic school?

This is called “dual enrollment.” For public schools, the answer is yes. The local public school district will be reimbursed by the state for your student’s partial enrollment. Not realizing this, some public school districts may give you a difficult time about this though.

For Catholic schools, the answer is maybe. Sometimes the school will require taking religion or a certain number of courses along with whatever course you are requesting. Typically, parents are charged accordingly based upon the number of courses taken. Usually students are required to purchase and wear uniforms if all the other students do so.

If any of your reasons for leaving a school or not using an institutional school would still exist in this situation, we caution against using this option even if it is available. Sometimes parents need to consider other options and not look to institutional schools as the only source for supplemental academics. Other options might include a single course from a full-service curriculum provider, a video course, online courses, a course at a local homeschool co-op, a community college course, a course from another college, or hiring a tutor.

Please note that during the high school years, courses at a college give dual enrollment credits—credits towards both high school and college simultaneously. If your students would like to take any classes at the college level, we recommend that you do some research beforehand if that is not the college from which the student intends to graduate. Many colleges will accept AP tests, CLEP tests, and general education college courses to transfer from one college to another. However, some do not. Some majors may have additional course requirements (for example, chemistry for science majors versus chemistry for non-science majors). Also, most colleges do not want the student to take courses specific to their major outside of their institution (e.g. Computer majors might find that computer courses at other colleges will not be accepted at the college where they wish to receive their degree) unless pre-approved. If the student will be attending that college after high school, however, it should not be as much of a problem. We recommend that you and your student research possible colleges and careers early in the high school years so that you are informed of your options.

Sometimes paying for a course that is helpful during high school, even if the credits will not transfer into the college of your choice later, might be worth the extra expense for the knowledge gained.

Is there special curriculum for special needs students?

Yes. Many book publishers do have excellent materials for special needs students. Some of the full-service curriculum providers deal with this as well. For instance, Seton Home Study School has a Special Needs Department with well over 1000 books which can be substituted for their typical curriculum based upon the needs of the particular student for all grade levels and all degrees of academic challenge.

Can home-educated students receive special education services at the local public school?

Yes, however, despite the federal and state laws, school districts are very hesitant in providing services to their own students, so do not expect this to be easy to achieve for your student either. For special needs students, the Home Education Law provides, “*The supervisor of a home education program may request [district may not insist] that the school district or intermediate unit of residence provide services that address the specific needs of the exceptional student in the home education program. [Services may not be pushed on the family but the district may refuse services] When the provision of services is agreed to by both the supervisor and the school district or intermediate unit, [Where services are provided] all services shall be provided in the public schools or in a private school licensed to provide such programs and services.*” As you will see in the following, the district should not have the right provided in the Home Education Law to deny services to special needs home-educated students.

Section 922.1-A of the Public School Code states, “*It is the intent of the General Assembly by this enactment to ensure that the intermediate units in the Commonwealth shall furnish on an equal basis auxiliary services to all pupils in the Commonwealth in both public and nonprofit nonpublic schools.*” This was written years before home education was written into the law and covered all known groups of students in the state at the time. Section 923-A also states, “*It is the intent of the General Assembly by this enactment to assure such a distribution of such educational aids [textbooks, instructional materials and instructional equipment] that every school child in the Commonwealth will equitably share in the benefits thereof.*” Finally, both Section 923.1-A and Section 923.2-A read, “*The General Assembly expressly finds and declares diagnostic and evaluative psychological services for children to be health services, and it is the intention of the General Assembly now to make these available, on a general and even-handed basis, to all school children in the Commonwealth.*” We hope that the Home Education Law in Pennsylvania will be amended in the future to eliminate the current law’s option to discriminate against home educated students. However, many families prefer to have these services provided by private sources, even if

they must bear the burden of the cost, in order to acquire better or more appropriate services or to maintain the privacy of the student's academic needs.

Does the federal “No Child Left Behind” provision affect home educators?

No. This federal Act is intended to require states to hold their school districts accountable for the federal funding they receive. It requires states to have academic requirements for their schools to meet in order to continue receiving federal funding. The No Child Left Behind provision states in Title IX, Part E, Subpart 1, Section 9506. Private, Religious, and Home Schools:

“(b) APPLICABILITY TO HOME SCHOOLS- Nothing in this Act shall be construed to affect a home school, whether or not a home school is treated as a home school or a private school under State law, nor shall any student schooled at home be required to participate in any assessment referenced in this Act.

“(c) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION ON PROHIBITION OF FEDERAL CONTROL OVER NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS- Nothing in this Act shall be construed to permit, allow, encourage, or authorize any Federal control over any aspect of any private, religious, or home school, whether or not a home school is treated as a private school or home school under State law. This section shall not be construed to bar private, religious, or home schools from participation in programs or services under this Act.

“(d) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION ON STATE AND LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY MANDATES- Nothing in this Act shall be construed to require any State educational agency or local educational agency [public school district] that receives funds under this Act to mandate, direct, or control the curriculum of a private or home school, regardless or whether or not a home school is treated as a private school under state law, nor shall any funds under this Act be used for this purpose.”

STANDARDIZED TESTING

Do my students have to be given tests?

Standardized tests are only required of students in grades 3, 5, and 8. No other testing is *required* as a part of the Home Education Law. However, it may be required of a full-service curriculum provider or other educational program where you choose to enroll your student for all or supplemental academics.

If you are using a full-service curriculum provider, you should receive subject testing from the school. You may make up your own tests for your student or purchase them from book publishers, but giving tests to your students on a weekly or periodic basis is not required by law.

When should my students be given standardized tests if I don't assign grade levels to my students?

There is no formula given in the law as to when the parent should have the tests administered under those circumstances. However, many families will administer the test either when their children's age-mates are in those grades or when the student is primarily doing work at those grade levels. For instance, with a late bloomer who begins first grade upon reaching the compulsory attendance age of 8, the first standardized test might not be necessary until age 10. Should the district insist on a test when the age-mates are in third grade, the parent might have a first grade test administered as that is the appropriate test for that child at that time.

Are there specific scores that home-educated students are required to meet?

No. The law specifies that the test must be administered to the student in grades 3, 5, and 8 and that the parent cannot administer the test. There are no other requirements including required test score, and there is no provision for evaluators or school districts to challenge your right to continue your home education program based solely upon the results of these tests.

Do my special needs students have to be tested?

Yes, your student must be tested, but there is no legal requirement that the student be given a test at the academic level of his/her age-mates. A test can be administered that is at the grade level of the student's ability. The law is not specific about that, but in practice and practicality that is what is done.

Who pays for these tests?

If the test were administered at the public school district of residence, then the cost would be borne by the district. If the test were administered elsewhere, then the cost is borne by the parent. If you are enrolled with a full-service curriculum provider, the cost may already be included in your student fees. Check with your full-service

curriculum provider before ordering testing elsewhere. Neither the state nor the district reimburses parents for this unfunded mandate.

If the standardized test that I am using includes history or science sections, am I required to have my student complete those sections?

No. Section 1327.1(e)(1) of the law requires “in grades three, five and eight results of nationally normed standardized achievement tests in reading/language arts and mathematics or the results of Statewide tests administered in these grade levels.” [Emphasis ours] It also says, “At the discretion of the supervisor [the parent], the portfolio may include the results of nationally normed standardized achievement tests for other subject areas or grade levels.” [Emphasis ours] It is clearly up to the parent (or full-service curriculum provider) as to whether these sections are completed or not. It is entirely up to the parent as to whether or not test results are submitted in grade levels other than 3, 5, and 8. SAT and ACT scores for college admissions *are not* required to be submitted to the school district.

Even though I’m not required to submit testing in other years, is it a good idea to submit it anyway to show that my children are doing better than the average public school student?

It is never a good idea to give the district more than is required. Submitting documentation that could prove that you are doing better with your child than might occur in their school could only cause hostility and resentment towards you as a non-professional educator. To maintain civility, often it is best not to brag or show off to school district personnel. It is more appropriate to do that with the evaluator, college admissions personnel, scholarship committees, and employers.

Who administers the standardized test?

This depends on the test and the requirements of the testing company along with requirements of the Home Education Law. Some testing companies require that an individual with a bachelor’s degree administer the test. Others require that a certified teacher administer the test. Yet others require that the student’s normal teacher be the one to administer the test to maintain the standardization of the test.

However, the Home Education Law states in Section 1327.1(e)(1), “*The supervisor* [parent] *shall ensure that the nationally normed standardized tests or the Statewide tests shall not be administered by the child’s parent or guardian.*” Therefore, if the testing company does not have specific requirements, then any person of the parent’s choosing (grandma, the next door neighbor, an older sibling, etc.,) may administer the test. *The state’s only restriction* is that it may not be the parent.

Please note that this requirement of the Law is contrary to standardization of all other students in the Commonwealth and the country. Typically, these tests are standardized by having

- 1) the same instructions read,
- 2) to students of the same grade level,
- 3) in the student’s normal learning environment, and
- 4) by the student’s usual teacher.

In actuality, it is no longer standardized once someone else administers the test, but that is the present law.

Parents may administer the tests for students in any other grade, unless the testing company specifically requires administration by a certified teacher or some other individual. If you are using a full-service curriculum provider, please inquire as to their testing schedule, if any, before ordering testing elsewhere. Many of them have a specific time during the year when they send standardized tests to be administered to their students. However, they often will send a test sooner if requested.

When must the test be taken?

The Law does not specify a time. It may be administered to the student at any time during the school year. If the test were given but the results were not yet received when the portfolio is submitted, then a note should accompany the portfolio stating that the results will be forwarded to the district as soon as they are received. However, it is recommended that these tests be given far enough in advance to avoid this situation.

Which tests are accepted by the state?

The Home Education Law states in Section 1327.1(e)(1), “*The* [state] *department* [of Education] *shall establish a list, with a minimum of five tests, of nationally normed standardized tests from which the supervisor of the home*

education program shall select a test to be administered if the supervisor does not choose the Statewide tests.” The statewide test in Pennsylvania is the Pennsylvania State School Assessment (PSSA). Please note that your students are not required to take the PSSA, which is often given in years when homeschoolers are not legally required to be tested. This test has two flaws:

- 1) It is designed to test that the teachers in the public schools are instructing their students on the ‘academic standards’ included in PA’s Chapter 4 Regulations. Since home-educated students are not in the public schools, their participation in the test could invalidate or skew the scores of the district’s students and teachers as that student is not receiving a public school education.
- 2) The PSSA often contains information on issues of immorality, vice, and politically-correct beliefs that may not be in keeping with the family’s philosophies or beliefs. For example, the Chapter 4 Regulations list ‘evolution’ as a ‘biological science’ rather than as an ‘unproven theory.’ Although students are not required to be tested in science or history, this may appear in the English/reading test or in the math test in the form of reading problems.

The list of other tests approved by the state for use in a home education program are included in the latest Basic Education Circular at <http://www.pde.state.pa.us/k12/cwp/view.asp?A=11&Q=54281>.

- 1) California Achievement Test (CAT)
- 2) Comprehensive Testing Program (CTPIII)
- 3) Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS)
- 4) Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)
- 5) Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT)
- 6) Peabody Individual Test
- 7) Stanford Achievement Test (not to be confused with the *Scholastic* Achievement Test administered by the College Board for entrance to college)
- 8) Terra Nova
- 9) Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT)
- 10) Woodcock Johnson Revised Tests of Achievement



Many sources of standardized testing exist. However, Bob Jones University, a source used by many Protestant homeschoolers, would not be one that Catholics should patronize due to their strong anti-Catholic views. Fortunately, many other sources are available to Catholics as noted below. All of the below sources use tests on the above list and, therefore, are acceptable for your students.

All of the following offer their standardized testing services to any student regardless of whether the student is enrolled in their program or not unless otherwise noted.

Kolbe Academy (2501 Oak Street, Napa, CA 94559 or call 707-256-6499) takes requests for the CAT/5 Test (the 5th Edition of the California Achievement Test) for students in grades 1 through 12. Testing can be requested year round; however, from July to October it takes longer to get results returned. The fee is \$35 for registered students and \$45 for non-registered students. Requests for 5 or more tests are \$30 each. Registration can be done only at www.kolbe.org. These tests are not scored on site but are scored by the publisher so it generally takes 4-12 weeks to receive test scores.

Only students enrolled in **Mother of Divine Grace School** (P O Box 1810, Ojai, CA 93024; (805) 646-5818; www.motherofdivinegrace.org) for grades 3-10 may use their CAT/5 testing. The cost of the testing is part of the enrollment fees. Registration is done in the spring from February to May. After signing up the student has 30 days (from February to June) to take the test online.

The Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) is available to any students through **Our Lady of the Rosary School** (1010 Withrow Court, Bardstown, KY 40004 or call 502-348-1338). OLRs uses the 1965 version of the test to avoid issues of immorality/vice and politically-correct questions. Better statistics are expected from this test than updated versions for two additional reasons. The first is that it is not dumbed down. The second is that the scoring is done on a curve based on students who took the test that year, which was higher than today’s students. OLRs charges a fee of \$30 for their test. There is no charge for students taking the test for placement when initially enrolling in OLRs.

Our Lady of Victory School (421 South Lochsa Street, Post Falls, ID 83854 or call 208-773-7265) refers their students to Mrs. Sara T. Dunsford for testing. Mrs. Dunsford began homeschooling her children in 1972 and volunteered

to handle OLVS's standardized tests services in 1982. After 21 years of homeschool experience, Mrs. Dunsford's children are now grown, but she continues to offer the testing services. Like OLSR, she offers a challenging version of the Iowa Basic Skills Test (IBST) for students in grades K-12. The fee of \$15 includes an \$8 deposit which is refunded when the test is returned. A request for testing and checks payable to Mrs. Sara T. Dunsford may be sent to 5840 West Winchcomb Drive, Glendale, AZ 85306.

For a cost of \$25 per test, **Seton Home Study School** (1350 Progress Drive, Front Royal, VA 22630 or call 540-636-9000) provides the California Achievement Test (CAT). Since Seton scores the tests in house, the results are usually mailed back in two or three days. Seton does not charge for those taking the test for placement when initially enrolling. Enrolled students also automatically receive a test at no charge when the third quarter tests are returned. If you are enrolled with Seton and are late in returning the third quarter tests, Seton will send the test sooner to have the results in time for evaluations and submission with the portfolio.

Each test is different and has its pluses and minuses. However, in many situations with large homeschool families, cost, availability, and other factors will determine which test parents will choose. To order tests from any of the above sources, send them your check and a letter requesting the standardized test along with the child's name, address, phone number and the grade level of the test you desire to use.

Where are these tests administered?

There is no provision in the law for a mandated testing location. Students who perform better when not distracted by other students in a group setting may be accommodated by making the appropriate arrangements. It is recommended that the test be taken in the environment that is most comfortable for the student.

Students may request taking the test offered at the local public school; however, this could put the student in a less familiar environment and affect the test results. Some homeschool co-ops or evaluators may offer group testing. Again, this may affect the student's performance if this is not a comfortable environment or test administrator for the student. The only provision in the law is that the test not be administered by the student's parent in grades 3, 5, and 8. Anyone else (friend, relative, or neighbor) may administer the test in any location and at any time of day determined by the parent and the chosen proctor. In all other grade levels, however, the parent may administer the tests.

EVALUATIONS & DOCUMENTATION

Who needs an evaluation?

All students who have an affidavit on file with the school district must have an evaluation by a certified teacher, licensed psychologist, or an alternative evaluator. Students who have attained the age of 17 are not required to have an evaluation since they are beyond the age of compulsory attendance. However, if parents want the district to sign the PHEAA form (available at www.catholichomeschoolpa.org/hsforms.html) to receive a state grant from the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA), then it might be better to continue doing evaluations until this has been signed. Please note that, whether the student goes on to college or not, the PHEAA form is acknowledged by the PA Department of Education as equivalent to a high school diploma. Such a form should be photocopied and treated as an important legal document.

When should the student be evaluated?

This may be done at any time before June 30. The school year need not be done by the time of the evaluation, but it must be completed and documentation submitted to the superintendent of the local public school district by June 30. This is not addressed in the law, but it is how evaluations have needed to be done as a result of the heavy load many evaluators carry and the scheduling necessary to accommodate those students.

Will the school district assign me an evaluator? Who pays the evaluator?

No. The parent pays the evaluator and the parent chooses the evaluator. Typically, this is someone who is accustomed to evaluating homeschooled students, and often that person is a homeschool parent as well. Neither the state nor the school district will reimburse parents for this unfunded mandate.

Who qualifies as an evaluator?

- A licensed clinical or school psychologist
- A teacher certified by the Commonwealth

- *“Shall have experience [at any time in the past] at the elementary level to evaluate elementary students or at the secondary level to evaluate secondary students.”* Section 1327.1(e)(2)
- A nonpublic school teacher (who is not certified to teach in PA)
 - *“shall have at least two years of teaching experience in a Pennsylvania public or nonpublic school within the last ten years.”* Section 1327.1(e)(2) However, the law is not clear as to whether this applies only to those who are going to evaluate for the first time or if it also applies to those who continue to evaluate. See the ‘alternative evaluator’ information below if your superintendent should express a concern about this.
 - *“shall have the required experience at the elementary level to evaluate elementary students or at the secondary level to evaluate secondary students.”* Section 1327.1(e)(2)
- A nonpublic school administrator
 - *“shall have at least two years of teaching experience in a Pennsylvania public or nonpublic school within the last ten years.”* Section 1327.1(e)(2)
 - *“shall have the required experience at the elementary level to evaluate elementary students or at the secondary level to evaluate secondary students.”* Section 1327.1(e)(2)
- *“At the request of the supervisor [the parent], persons with other qualifications may conduct the evaluation with the prior consent of the district of residence superintendent.”* Section 1327.1(e)(2) In this Guide a person qualifying to be an evaluator under this provision is referred to as an “alternative evaluator.”
- *“In no event shall the evaluator be the supervisor [the parent] or their spouse.”* Section 1327.1(e)(2) This is the only restriction on the person who can evaluate the student.

What type of teaching experience must these teachers have?

Even those teachers who have taught in the public schools must have the following qualifications.

- *“A teacher or administrator who evaluates a portfolio at the elementary level (grade kindergarten through six) shall have at least two years of experience in grading any of the following subjects: English, to include spelling, reading, reading and writing, arithmetic; science; geography; history of the United States and Pennsylvania; and civics.”* Section 1327.1(e)(1)(i)
- *“A teacher or administrator who evaluates a portfolio at the secondary level (grades seven through twelve) shall have at least two years of experience in grading any of the following subjects: English, to include language, literature, speech, reading and composition; science, to include biology, chemistry and physics; geography; social studies, to include economics, civics, world history, history of the United States and Pennsylvania; foreign language; and mathematics, to include general mathematics, algebra, trigonometry, calculus and geometry.”* Section 1327.1(e)(1)(ii)
- “Grading” is defined in the law as *“evaluation of classwork, homework, quizzes, classwork based tests and prepared tests related to classwork subject matter.”* Section 1327.1(e)(1)(iii) There are no such requirements for an “alternative evaluator” as defined in Section 1327.1(e)(2)

Do I have to show the school district proof that my evaluator is qualified including his/her teaching certificate?

There is nothing in the law that requires this. In fact, there are provisions in the law for non-certified teachers who have taught in two of the last ten years to evaluate. Such individuals would not have a certificate to reference yet they are legally qualified to evaluate homeschooled students. Districts who question this also are usually not aware that alternative evaluators may be used by families if prior approval has been given. It is the parent who hires and pays the evaluator; therefore, it is the parent who needs to know whether or not the evaluator is qualified.

Some districts will request that a copy of the evaluator’s teaching certificate or teaching certificate number be included in the evaluation letter. Since this number is the evaluator’s Social Security Number, most do not wish to give out this information to a district who is not hiring them. Notifying the district that it is the parent who is hiring the evaluator and the parent who needs to be assured of the necessary qualifications often is sufficient to have the matter dropped.

How do I request using an “alternative evaluator”?

To use this provision of the law, the parent should send a letter to the superintendent requesting that someone other than a certified teacher, licensed clinical or school psychologist, or a nonpublic school teacher or administrator be able to evaluate the student. We recommend asking for a response to your request for an

“alternative evaluator” by a specific date so that you can make other arrangements if your request is denied or so that both you and the prospective evaluator may plan accordingly. This alternative evaluator could be a college professor (who is not a certified teacher), a friend, a relative, a veteran home educator, a business person, someone certified to teach in a state other than Pennsylvania, or any other individual whom the parent believes possesses the knowledge necessary to determine whether or not their student(s) is receiving an appropriate education.

This procedure may also be used to request using as an evaluator someone who had been your student’s evaluator in elementary school but is not certified to otherwise continue doing evaluations for high school students. It may also be used to request using as an evaluator someone who has not taught in two of the last ten years. The only restriction is that the evaluator may not be the student’s parent or his/her spouse. Although the Home Education Law does not say what type of information is to be given to the superintendent, it is wise to note that you have the confidence that this person would be adequately qualified to evaluate your students due to either:

- ✓ his/her qualifications on an attached resume [optional] or
- ✓ his/her familiarity with your student’s home education program or
- ✓ he/she is certified to teach in a state other than Pennsylvania or
- ✓ his/her acquired knowledge of educational concepts/content or
- ✓ his/her experience as a veteran home educator.

This approval only needs to be requested the first year that you use the alternative evaluator. Thus, it is a good idea to request that arrangement for all of your children if that is what you intend. Although not addressed in the law, in practice, once a person has received approval to do evaluations in a particular district or in grade levels other than the individual’s certification, any other family in that school district may use that individual as an evaluator in future years without making a special request. This is provided that the district has no problems with that person’s evaluation(s) in the first year.

Is there anything that my full-service curriculum provider would have to do differently as an “alternative evaluator”?

Responsibilities of the evaluator are noted in Section 1327.1(e)(2) of the Home Education Law. Personnel from the full-service curriculum provider would be required to state the following based upon documentation graded by them:

- 1) whether or not the student had completed the required subjects in the PA Home Education Law;
- 2) whether or not the home education program was offered for the required time; and,
- 3) whether or not progress had occurred.

In addition, the full-service curriculum provider employee would need to interview the student, presumably by phone. If that person had seen the student’s submitted work, then the employee already would be familiar with the contents of the portfolio. Again, their personnel often cannot be used as an evaluator unless your superintendent has approved the use of that person or unless the individual holds an active or inactive PA teaching certification.

Your local superintendent will be more likely to approve such an arrangement if you note that the full-service curriculum provider is grading your student’s materials on a regular basis.

There is no deadline for making this request. However, the earlier in the year that you do it, the better. It is best to request that the district respond to you in writing and that you give the district a specified date for response that is about two weeks from the date of the letter. A lengthier response date might result in your request being forgotten. It is always best to get a response in writing, but it is possible to state in your letter that no response within 30 days will be considered by you to be an agreement on the part of the district to accept the alternative evaluator.

It is recommended that parents consult with the full-service curriculum provider before writing to the school district with a request to use their personnel as an alternative evaluator. Please note that some full-service curriculum providers may not have the staff or time to offer this service to their students.

My school district says they will be assigning me an evaluator. Can they do that?

No, they cannot. The parent is responsible for choosing and hiring the evaluator. If a district does offer the services of their teachers, the parent may choose whether to use that person or not. It would be better, however, for the parent to choose an unbiased independent evaluator to review the student’s home education program. Since the district’s superintendent is already expected to determine that all paperwork is in order, the district already has an official reviewing student documentation.

Additionally, the law states in Section 1327.1(e)(2), “*At the request of the supervisor, persons with other qualifications may conduct the evaluation with the prior consent of the district of residence superintendent.*” Since so many evaluators are already carrying a full load of students to evaluate, we highly encourage families to send a written request to their superintendent requesting that someone other than a certified teacher evaluate their students.

Do I need to notify the district of my choice of evaluator or must I have an evaluator chosen in order to begin homeschooling?

The school district does not need any information about your evaluator. The only information that your district needs on your evaluator is the letter written at the end of the year.

It is not necessary to choose an evaluator before beginning to home educate. However, the sooner you have that established, the less stressed you will be about the end-of-the-year paperwork.

When should I schedule my evaluation?

Once you establish who will do your students’ evaluations, you should ask that person when he/she prefers to begin scheduling.

Must I have the school year done in order to have the children evaluated?

No. Some evaluators are so busy that they will begin scheduling evaluations to be done as early as March. As long as there are enough days done that the student will definitely be able to finish the required time by June 30, then the evaluator can write the letter. Sometimes the evaluation will be done in advance, but the letter won’t be written until the family informs the evaluator that the days are done. Regardless, in order to get the evaluator you want, sometimes you need to have the evaluation done before the school year is complete.

Can the evaluator make suggestions or recommendations for the student’s education?

The Home Education Law does not give the evaluator any authority to determine the content of the student’s home education program for that year or any other year. The evaluator is only to determine that an appropriate education as defined above has occurred.

If, however, the parent requests suggestions or ideas from the evaluator, it would *not* be appropriate for the evaluator to include that information in the evaluation letter. The parent also is not required to implement anything beyond the requirements of the law (required time; required subjects, not specific content; and progress). The content of the student’s home education program is at the sole discretion of the parent. However, the parent is not prohibited from asking the evaluator or anyone else for suggestions or advice.

Many parents do not find that their evaluator is the one they go to for recommendations or advice. Many seek the recommendations of full-service curriculum provider’s personnel although a very large number find assistance from local home educating mothers, at curriculum fairs, conferences and workshops, from books written for home educators, from email lists formed for home educators, and many other readily available sources.

What else should I look for in an evaluator?

You should try to choose someone who is supportive of your teaching style and your student’s learning style. It is also excellent if the person is familiar with your curriculum. It is recommended that you choose someone who is very familiar with the concept of home education, not someone you want to win over to it.

There are various evaluation approaches. It is very important to get a proper match between the homeschool family and the evaluator. Regardless of the amount of academics done in the home, some evaluators are ‘minimalists’ where the portfolio and written evaluation letters are concerned. Other evaluators want to see portfolios and write evaluations that are very extensive. Some evaluators are flexible basing the extent of their letters on the preference of the parent. Be sure to discuss these and any other issues with whomever you are considering to evaluate your children to make sure that you are paying someone who is a good match for the way that your family complies with the Home Education Law.

An evaluator *should not be* someone who believes that

- 1) education at home should be identical to that offered in a school;
- 2) that it should be godless/politically correct like public schools;
- 3) that you should over comply with the law by producing paperwork that is not required or in excess of that required;

- 4) that the evaluator is an agent of the state;
- 5) that the evaluator is to impose his/her own standards on your homeschool;
- 6) that interviews of the student should be performed without the parent present;
- 7) tests the child during the interview especially without any knowledge of the content covered;
- 8) that the evaluator is like a pseudo-social worker or government investigator;
- 9) usually should the person be someone you are trying to win over to the idea of home education.

The evaluator is paid by you to determine if you are complying with the Home Education Law, not requirements and restrictions of public schools or any other school system. The evaluator should also be willing to back you up if the school district should ever decide to challenge your home education program in a due process hearing. For this reason, it is best to have an evaluator who is very familiar with the requirements of the Home Education Law and capable of expressing that to a hearing examiner.

If you accidentally hire someone who does not respect your God-given right to make educational choices for your student, do not be discouraged and hire someone else.



How does the evaluator perform the evaluation? What does the evaluator look for?

“The evaluation shall also be

- *based on an interview of the child and*
- *a review of the portfolio required...*
- *and shall certify whether or not an appropriate education is occurring.”* Section 1327.1(e)(2)

Therefore, that is the sole purpose of the evaluation and required content of the letter.

Must we meet in person with the evaluator?

No. There is nothing in the law that states that the evaluation must be done in person. However, the evaluator must interview the child, which can be done by telephone, and review the portfolio by fax or mail.

How long does an evaluation take?

It may last anywhere from 15 minutes to 1 hour, but there is no reason for the evaluation part of the meeting to last longer than one hour per student. If the paperwork is easy to locate (booklist, list of required subjects, record of required time, proof of progress, and standardized test results for any students in grades 3, 5, and 8), the evaluation can go much more quickly.

What is an appropriate education?

The Home Education Law defines an appropriate education to be *“a program consisting of instruction”*:

- *“in the required subjects”*
- *“for the time required”* and
- *“in which the student demonstrates sustained progress in the overall program.”* Section 1327.1(a)

Very simply, the student must be provided either the 180 days or required hours of instruction, with the required subjects for either elementary or secondary grades, and must have progressed in the educational program. The law is not absolutely clear, however, whether this is referring to progress since last year or progress across the school year in question.

What are the “required subjects”?

Below is the subject list as stated in the Home Education Law:

Elementary (age 8-grade 6)

- English
 - Spelling
 - Reading
 - Writing
- Arithmetic
- Science

Secondary (grade 7-age 17** or grade 12)

- English
 - *Language
 - *Literature
 - *Speech
 - *Composition
- Science

- Geography
- *History of the United States
- *History of Pennsylvania
- *Civics
- Safety education, including regular and continuous instructions in the dangers of prevention of fires
- Health and physiology
- Physical education
- Music
- Art

- Geography
- Social studies
 - *Civics
 - *World history
 - *History of the United States
 - *History of Pennsylvania
- Mathematics
 - *General mathematics
 - *Algebra (usually covered as levels 1 & 2)
 - *Geometry
- *Art
- *Music
- *Physical education
- *Health
- Safety education, including regular and continuous instruction in the dangers and prevention of fire
- Additional courses at the discretion of the home education supervisor (the parent)***

*These courses/topics traditionally are not required every year.

**The compulsory attendance law requires that students must be in attendance at a school or homeschool until their 17th birthday. After that date, parents may choose whether or not they wish to continue doing the home education paperwork regardless of whether or not the student completes the home education program. Some diploma options may not offer this choice, however.

***The Home Education Law offers the option to also include, “economics; biology; chemistry; foreign languages; trigonometry; or other age appropriate courses as contained in Chapter 5 (Curriculum Requirements) of the State Board of Education.” Chapter 5 has been replaced with the Chapter 4 Regulations of ‘academic standards’ for public schools. Parents are not required to offer these subjects, but they are permitted to add them or any other ‘age appropriate courses’ at their discretion. This may include recommended courses necessary for preparation for a particular major in college.

Are home-educated students required to follow the content requirements for the state’s Chapter 4 Regulations (a/k/a academic standards)?

No. Those are mandated for the public schools who receive funding from the state. Many families, especially Catholic families, would not desire to follow those standards as they may include some attitudes and beliefs in conflict with Catholic Church teaching.

Where does the law define “elementary” and “secondary” levels?

This is not addressed directly but rather indirectly. In Section 1327.1(e)(1)(i) and Section 1327.1(e)(1)(ii), the evaluator qualifications define elementary level as “grades kindergarten through six” and secondary level as “grades seven through twelve.” Therefore, it would be presumed that this is the definition for the students they would evaluate as well.

What is meant by “required time”?

Section 1327.1(c) states that a student is in compliance with compulsory attendance (in other words, the student is not truant) if the home education program meets the time requirements. The time required is either 180 days or 900 hours for students up to grade 6. For students in grades 7-12 the required time is either 180 days or 990 hours. The parent, not the district, chooses which method of logging time will be used.

Must the students do both the days and the hours?

No. The law clearly states “or”. The determination of doing days or hours is up to the discretion of the parent(s). Most institutional schools follow the requirement for days only. If at any time during the school year they have an early dismissal, a late start, or leave early because of snow, the institutional schools have not completed both the days *and* hours. Most schools do not require that seniors complete all 180 days either; however, home-educated seniors must complete the year to be in compliance with the law’s evaluation requirements. Therefore, home educating families who choose to use only days are fully in compliance with the law and with traditional educational practices.

Must I record what is done during all instructional time?

There is nothing in the law which clearly requires this, especially if the parent is documenting days, not hours. A “detailed daily instructional time and activity” could be construed to be documenting hours for a family which is choosing to document days. However, it would be wise to at least note on a calendar or elsewhere which days were school days just in case your home education program were questioned or accused of truancy. Any detailed documentation or ‘assignment sheets’ used by the parent may be maintained, but they should not be required by the district even if the parent is documenting hours. Districts could be accused of unduly burdening the parent with paperwork that is not intended to educate the child, but rather takes away from it. However, with no clear definition, there is no way of knowing how a court of law might rule on this.

Please note that a home education log will be very different from a school teacher’s log. This is because a school teacher must document details of instructional time and activities in order to be accountable to the taxpayers, the parents, and governments who fund the school. They are also accountable to the other teachers within that grade and the teachers the students will move on to the next year. The teacher may also need documentation for performance pay raises. Additionally, the institutional school teacher must have documentation for substitute teachers who might show up at a moment’s notice should the teacher have an unexpected illness or emergency.

Home educators are not accountable to taxpayers or others because they receive no outside funds. They also receive no salary for what they do, nor do they have substitute teachers to worry about. Public schools are accustomed to seeing very different logs than are practical for home education; thus, it may be necessary to know the difference. A home education log should be whatever the parent needs for planning and assignment purposes. Sometimes that comes in the form of copyrighted lesson plans that must be returned to a full-service curriculum provider or used by the parents over the summer on another student in the household. Therefore, some of what a public school might like to see just is not doable or practical for the home educator.

What is required to be included in “the log”?

This particular language is a prime example of the law’s lack of clarity and poor legal construction. As currently written, this language indicates a list of books written “contemporaneously” (as they are introduced to the student). For instance, if several books were used for English, they would be listed in the order in which they are introduced.

Notice that the law does not require the maintenance of a log book or a list of instructional activity. A log book is a detailed listing of educational activity maintained by classroom teachers. Again, the purpose of the log book is for the school teacher to show accountability to their bosses (superintendent, school board, principal, parents) should their job performance be questioned. It is also to create continuity of instruction should a substitute teacher be necessary. Home educators are not employees of the district or state nor do they hire substitute teachers. Therefore, a detailed, daily log book is not specifically required in the law. If a detailed method were utilized by the parent in assigning student work, it is not required to be submitted to the district for review as the law does not mention this, and it could be giving the district too much private academic information about the student. However, due to the vagueness of this provision in the law, it would be necessary to have it addressed by the legislature or a court of law for absolute clarity as some districts do harass parents over this issue.

If my students are active outside of homeschool hours, does that count towards their required subjects?

Absolutely. Art classes and music lessons would certainly count as would all time spent practicing a musical instrument or singing. Sports activities, dance classes and gymnastics classes would all count towards student physical education classes as would many other physical activities such as swimming in a pool and riding bicycles. Schoolwork done on weekends, during the summer, during the traditional “Christmas break” and on legal holidays can be counted as well. Your school days or hours do not have to be the same as those of an institutional school.

If I do school on a weekend, how do I put that in the logbook?

If the day of the week is pre-printed in a logbook, you can cross it out and write in the actual day. If the book has space for five days in a week, you may have to change the names of all the days or get a different bookkeeping system. As far as an attendance record for the district, a grid type chart or calendar may be sufficient.

When your children do school work, they deserve to get the credit for it. So don’t feel locked into the format of something that doesn’t work for you. You can make up your own logbook pages on your computer if necessary. Some format examples are available at www.catholichomeschoolpa.org/hsforms.html.

Do homeschooled students get sick days and do the moms get teacher's in-service days?

The short answer is that neither of these are dealt with in the Home Education Law.

In an institutional school, students who miss school due to illness, must have a note from home or a doctor and the work that would have been done that day typically must be completed. If the work would not need to be caught up by students in institutional schools, then one would presume that there might be some means of considering sick days as possible for home educated students. Often students are well enough to do something at some point in the day. If a student expects to have extensive amounts of sick time, therapies, or medical testing, it is recommended that the family consider using the entire calendar year including Saturdays and other traditional vacation days to complete the 180 days. This allows flexibility when illness warrants a full day off. If necessary, parents may wish to count hours instead so that all partial days are acknowledged.

Regarding teachers' in-service days, those are mandated by law for teachers in institutional schools. They are not a mandate for home educators. However, students could do 'a day of school' by having a field trip with Dad while Mom is attending the Catholic Homeschool Conference & Curriculum Fair in April.

What is "sustained progress"?

"Sustained progress" is not defined in the law and is a subjective determination of the evaluator.

What does the evaluator NOT look for? What does the evaluation letter NOT address?

Noting whether or not the student has been offered the required subjects for the required time and that progress has occurred is all that is required to be a part of the written evaluation. Any personal information not required by the Home Education Law, such as information regarding your student's medical health, should not be addressed in the written evaluation by ethical, law-abiding evaluators who are respectful of the family's and student's right to privacy.

Parents may wish to request opinions or suggestions from the evaluator regarding various aspects of their homeschool program, particularly for the following year. Regardless of what the evaluator's suggestions may be at that moment, the parent knows the student best and is still free to make the final determination on these matters. Suggestions or recommendations for the following year are not addressed in the law as part of the evaluation. The evaluator is not instructed by law to make any mandates to the parent on how the children should be educated nor is he/she instructed by law to note them in the evaluation letter. However, this may be done separately if the parent needs something in writing for reference purposes or for documentation for a diploma program.

What is a portfolio?

The portfolio is end-of-the-year documentation that the parent must "*provide and maintain on file for each student enrolled in the home education program*" Section 1327.1(e). More on that appears below.

What end-of-the-year documentation should the parent produce for the evaluator and school district? What does it mean to "over comply with the law"?

"Over compliance with the law" refers to submitting more paperwork than is required by law. It does not refer to the extent to which the student is educated. Academic requirements of the law are minimums and can be exceeded as much as is appropriate for the student.

"Minimalists" refers to those who give the district only what is required by law, while "over compliers" give the district all of the paperwork the law requires and more. However, what is shown to the evaluator is often more than what needs to be submitted to the school district.

Following the Catholic principle of subsidiarity, more and more Catholic families have become "minimalists." According to this principle, decisions should be made as close to the affected person as possible. In this case, that would mean that the parent should be making all decisions regarding the education of his/her own children. Seeking academic evaluation and oversight by those other than the parents appears to be contrary to Church teaching. The Church teaches as follows:

"The right and duty of parents to give education is essential, since it is connected with the transmission of human life; it is original and primary with regard to the education role of others...it is irreplaceable and inalienable, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others."

Familiaris Consortio, Pope John Paul II

"The charge laid by God on parents, to provide for the material and spiritual well-being of their offspring

and to procure for them a suitable training, imbued with the true spirit of religion, cannot be wrested from them without grave violation of their rights.”
Summi Pontificatus, Pope Pius XI

“Parents have a most grave duty and enjoy the primary right of educating to the very best of their ability, their children physically, socially, culturally, morally, and religiously as well.”

1983 Code of Canon Law, Canon 1136

In light of this fact, parents who are minimalists are often those who believe either that the school district and/or evaluator neither has any divine right to oversee nor should appear to have authority over their children’s education. Therefore, minimalist parents will comply with the law only in the means necessary to also comply with their duties and responsibilities as law abiding citizens. They will also work toward changing the law to more fully reflect the respect for parental authority and parental autonomy that is apparent in Church teaching.

What is specifically required to be included in that portfolio?

Nothing in the Home Education Law addresses the maximum amount of paperwork to be submitted. Items underlined in the right column are the minimum documents required by law. More and more families have found some variation of the following to be a means of complying with the law. The required end-of-year documentation as per Section 1327.1(e)(1) and (2) includes:

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

“A portfolio of records and materials. The portfolio shall consist of a log, made contemporaneously [as you do it] with the instruction, which designates by title the reading materials used,”

“samples of any writings, worksheets, workbooks or creative materials used or developed by the student”

“and in grades three, five and eight results of nationally normed standardized achievement tests in reading/ language arts and mathematics or the results of Statewide tests administered in these grade levels. At the discretion of the supervisor,

“MINIMALIST” REPORTING

Although this is one of the vague areas of the law, it is definitely required to submit a list of books. Some families will copy the packing slip from their curriculum provider if all books were used. The list can be arranged as a subject list with a notation of the books used following the subject name. Any courses that use no book can list “no text used.” This would assist the evaluator in seeing that all **required subjects** have been covered while simultaneously providing the list of books. The language regarding the method of recording time (days or hours) is not clear. Notice that the law *does not* require a detailed daily list of activities *nor* does it require the amount of time spent on each activity. Despite the fact that some may find the booklist to be the only thing specifically noted to be a part of the “log,” some kind of attendance record or time log should be done since the evaluator needs to “certify” that the **required time** has been or will be completed by June 30.

Anyone who samples a batch of cookies does not eat them all. Therefore, only a few ‘samples’ of what the child has done in those subjects where paperwork is produced is the only documentation necessary to show academic **progress**. If the student does not produce “any writings, worksheets, workbooks or creative materials” for that subject (i.e. physical education), then the parent is not obligated to show written documentation of that subject in the portfolio. Your sentimental photos of field trips are not required to be submitted either. Some parents might include a ‘list of objectives met’ in these subjects, but that is not required by law either. The parent, not the evaluator or the school district, has full discretion to determine which samples and how many are to be included in the portfolio. No authority has been given to the evaluator or the district to request specific documentation or content in any subject area.

Even if the student is given a standardized test in any other grade, only in grades 3, 5, and 8 must the results be included in the portfolio. There are no legal requirements regarding scores.

the portfolio may include the results of nationally normed standardized achievement tests for other subject areas or grade levels.”

“An annual written evaluation of the student's educational progress...” The parent, not the evaluator, submits the letter to the district. The evaluator's letter must accompany the portfolio.

We strongly recommend submitting to the school district photocopies of records and student work rather than originals. Portfolios have been known to become misplaced.

How much documentation is enough for the portfolio?

The parent is to assemble the portfolio and, therefore, has the right to determine what is included. Neither the evaluator nor the school district is given any authority to determine what is or is not included. Remember that the items in your student's portfolio are private academic records containing private academic information on your student. Only a few *samples* of student work should be adequate to demonstrate progress. There is never any need to show that the student was writing, typing or producing visible proof of education for every day of the year especially since much time is spent reading and/or researching. Since sampling cookies would not require eating all of them, giving samples of student documentation should not require submitting every piece of paper produced by the student.

Your students are not competing with the public school's students. Portfolios are not intended to impress or amaze anyone, just to establish progress. However, you may maintain an extensive amount of documentation at home as a memento of the year and submit a scaled down version to the district. Again, we recommend submitting only photocopies, not originals, to the district. The evaluator, on the other hand, would typically review as much information as you would like to show him/her.

What if my school district is requesting additional documentation?

You are only required to submit what is required by law. It is best to report such information to home education leaders, an attorney, and/or your state representative and state senator. They can help you to determine whether or not the district is overstepping their bounds in making such a request.

Is an evaluation for a special needs student different?

No. There are no special qualifications for the evaluator or for the evaluation process of a special needs student.

What does the evaluation letter say?

It should indicate that the evaluator reviewed the student portfolio and interviewed the student. In grades 3, 5, and 8, it should state that the standardized test was administered. It should also certify that the student was provided with instruction for the required time, in the required subjects and that progress occurred. No other private academic information about the student or his/her education is required to be included in the letter.

Can my evaluation be used as a letter of recommendation for college or some other purpose?

Evaluation letters are not written with that purpose in mind. They are only intended to note that the student complied with the Home Education Law. The evaluator also may not know the family or student well enough to testify to the student's character and other qualities that would be needed for a letter of recommendation.

Additionally, colleges, scholarships, employers and others requesting a letter of recommendation expect the letter to be addressed to them, not the public school superintendent. They are expected to be written by someone who knows the student well and has frequent contact with the student over a period of at least two to three years, if not longer. Contact with the student for one hour a year is not sufficient to write a letter of recommendation unless the particular evaluator is familiar with the student in some capacity other than just evaluations. It also would be a real disappointment to find a student disqualified or a procedure delayed because the evaluation letter did not meet the specific content or length requirements of that college or organization.

If, however, you wish to have your evaluator write a separate letter for such purposes, that is certainly acceptable. Additionally, evaluators may write a separate and more lengthy letter if such a letter is a requirement of

a state-recognized diploma program or some other purpose. However, the local public school district does not need more information on your student than is required by law.

Who pays for the evaluation?

The cost of evaluation is borne by the parent. Thus, this is an unfunded mandate on the family; however, the parent chooses the evaluator, not the state or school district.

How much does an evaluation cost?

Some evaluators do not charge a fee. Others can exceed \$100. However, many home educators pay between \$20 and \$50 per student usually with discounts for additional students in the same family.

How does the evaluation letter get to the school district?

The evaluator's letter and the portfolio (containing the book list, log of days or hours, samples of written work, standardized testing in the appropriate grades) are to be submitted to the superintendent of your local public school "at the conclusion of each public school year," according to Section 1327.1(h). Every one of the state's 501 public school districts have their last day of instruction on a different day each year—some in May and some in June. However, their school tax year ends on June 30. Therefore, the deadline to get this material to the superintendent is June 30.

What if my public school district wants me to send my portfolio to someone else at the school district?

The Home Education Law only provides that beginning and end-of-year documentation be submitted to the superintendent of the local public school district. It does not provide for the superintendent to designate that someone else (director of curriculum, school psychologist, principal) may receive that information. Therefore, you are always right in addressing or delivering the documentation directly to the superintendent. In other parts of the Public School Code it does state "the superintendent or his designee" allowing someone else the option of this responsibility. However, in the Home Education Law it only states "superintendent."

A few school districts have caused great distress to their families by requiring that the portfolios be submitted to the public school psychologist. This may be due to a lighter work load for him/her once their school year ends and portfolios begin to arrive. Regardless, the school psychologist is NEVER an appropriate person to review homeschool portfolios. First of all, they usually do not know the Home Education Law and what is required of it. Secondly, it would be impossible for them to turn off their psychological analyzing ability. Since home educated students are not required by law to have psychological analysis, this would not be an appropriate use of the school psychologist. Thirdly, no district should be able to say, "We have all of the homeschoolers [psychologically] evaluated by the school psychologist." Assignment of homeschoolers to the school psychologist is never appropriate or acceptable.

Do I have to issue report cards to my students?

No, you do not. However, it is recommended that your students have some sort of transcript of work done at the high school level. Diploma programs and full-service curriculum providers usually produce these for you. Parents who are not using those programs would want, at a minimum, to maintain a list of subjects, number of credits or partial-credits earned and a letter or number grade for each subject of each year of high school. Even if the student is not intending to go to college, it is always a good idea to have documentation of the high school courses. Course descriptions and other information are sometimes helpful but certainly optional. Additionally, a Grade Point Average can be easily calculated. More information on transcripts and calculating the GPA is available on the network website at www.catholichomeschoolpa.org/highschool.html.

Do I have to give grades to my students?

Parents are only required to note the student's name and age on the affidavit, not any grade level. However, there are 3 types of grades for a home educated student.

1) Number or letter grades on tests and other student work. A number or letter grade is based upon academic performance. This is not necessary or required by law although colleges and scholarships usually want to know how well the student mastered the high school materials introduced. These would appear on a transcript which virtually all colleges require when applying for admissions. However, that is only regarding the high school level courses. For example, "I got an A on my history report and a 97 on my math test."

2) Grade level of work the student is assigned. The grade level of work indicates what the student is capable of accomplishing without being bored or over challenged. It may be the grade level of the majority of the subject areas or of all the subject areas. For example, if spelling is at the fourth-grade level, math is at the sixth-grade level, and all subjects are at the fifth grade level, then the parent might say that the student is doing fifth-grade work. The school district does not need to know the grade level of work the student has accomplished. Some families use this as the determining factor when deciding when to give the third-grade, fifth-grade, and eighth-grade standardized tests.

3) Grade of the student based upon graduation date. This does not have to be the same as the student's age-mates or the level of work being studied. The time at which your student will graduate is based upon the completion of the graduation requirements, course work at the secondary level *and* the maturity of the student as determined by the parent. Typically, it is most challenging to determine when the student has a summer or early fall birth date or when it is a boy who could use another year of maturity.

With the above three types of grades defined it is, therefore, possible to say that a 10th-grade student received a *grade* of 93 on a literature test which was taught at the 11th-grade level. However, the district is only required to know the student's name and age.

How do I get the portfolio and evaluator's letter to the superintendent?

You can either drop it off at the superintendent's office or mail it. If dropped off, it is recommended that you have a secretary or someone else sign a receipt as your proof that you met the June 30 deadline. If it is mailed, it is recommended that it be sent by certified mail/return receipt requested to show proof of receipt before the June 30 deadline. This will eliminate any conflict should the district misplace documents that were submitted in a timely manner.

Will the school district keep my portfolio on file or will I get it back?

The district is not to keep your portfolio. However, accidents are known to happen while materials are at the district offices. Since these are often very cherished and irreplaceable mementos of the student's year, photocopies are recommended instead of original documents.

When I got my portfolio back from the school district, the superintendent had written comments and made markings on various pages of my children's work. Are they allowed to do that?

There is nothing in the law that allows district personnel to alter, modify, damage, or permanently mark up student documentation. If he/she wants to put post-it notes or something non-permanent on the papers, she probably could. However, these are the personal property of the student and she has no right to permanently change these student mementos of their academic year. If you do not want the district doing this, we suggest writing a letter to the superintendent and anyone else who had access to the portfolio. In the letter politely state that you noticed such markings on your student's private, academic documentation. Let them know that this documentation is not appreciated since you save this documentation as special mementos for your children, and you hope that they will be more respectful of your student's private property in the future. However, an even better response is to only submit photocopies of student documentation. This way your originals will not be damaged or altered.

GRADUATION AND DIPLOMA OPTIONS

What must a student do to graduate from a home education program?

Section 1327.1(d) of the Home Education Law states as follows: "*The following minimum courses [emphasis ours] in grades nine through twelve are established as a requirement for graduation in a home education program:*

- (1) *Four years of English.*
- (2) *Three years of mathematics.*
- (3) *Three years of science.*
- (4) *Three years of social studies.*
- (5) *Two years of arts and humanities."*



College bound students will usually do much more than this, but this is the minimum to legally be graduated from a home education program.

Can a student fulfill these requirements by taking college courses during high school years?

Absolutely! Taking college courses during high school allows a student to receive both high school and college credit for the courses completed. This is one type of “dual enrollment.”

How do I document that my student has graduated?

The law does not provide for an answer to this question. However, the PA Department of Education has established the following requirements to document graduation for state grant purposes. Since these are acceptable by the state for receiving state grants for college, it is arguably acceptable for other purposes as well, including being able to home educate their own children.

- 1) after completion of 30 college credits, the student may request a Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma from the state;
- 2) take the GED test to qualify for a General Equivalency Diploma;
- 3) receive a diploma from a state-recognized diploma program (http://www.pde.state.pa.us/home_education/cwp/view.asp?a=150&Q=46560&home_educationNav=|3376|&home_educationNav=|) [Please note that these are not full-service curriculum providers.];
- 4) have the “PHEAA letter” (available from the Pennsylvania Home Education Assistance Agency or www.catholichomeschoolpa.org/hsforms.html) signed by the superintendent of the local public school district. Although diplomas from full-service curriculum providers are fine for all other purposes, this last option is used frequently by those students for purposes of receiving a PHEAA grant and to home educate their own children. Also this is used for these purposes by those who grant parent-issued diplomas. This signed letter is considered the equivalent of a diploma by the state so it should be copied and treated as an important legal document.

Are diplomas from full-service curriculum providers acceptable?

Absolutely, yes. Diplomas from full-service curriculum providers are acceptable for all purposes in all other states. Thus, the PA Department of Education recommends that students with these diplomas have the superintendent sign the PHEAA letter available at the link above so that these students are not required to purchase another type of diploma for PHEAA grant and other purposes. In fact, the PDE possibly could expand the above list and accept diplomas from these schools, especially Seton Home Study School which has multiple types of accreditation. However, at this time they do not.

Since not all students qualify for state grants, this may not be an issue for every family. It would only be an issue if the graduate of the full-service curriculum provider will be attending college at any time in his or her life—provided that this policy remains the same for that long and provided that the student is considering a college in the Commonwealth of PA.

Can a parent issue his/her own diploma to the children?

Absolutely, yes. There is no law preventing a parent from doing so. A parent-issued diploma is accepted by the federal government and in all other states at the present time. Although the parent-issued diploma may be acknowledged for some purposes, it is not acknowledged at this time for state grant purposes or home educating their own children in the state of PA. The PDE possibly could expand the above list of accepted documentation to include these diplomas at any time if it so chooses.

The only way to get equivalency status for such a student in Pennsylvania is to get the “PHEAA letter” signed by the public school district. Thus, by having the superintendent sign this form, it frees up these students from having to purchase another type of diploma. The PHEAA form is available at www.catholichomeschoolpa.org/hsforms.html. Since not all students qualify for state grants, this may not be an issue for every family. It would only be an issue if the graduate will be attending college at any time in his or her life—provided that this policy remains the same for that long and provided that the student is considering a college in the Commonwealth of PA, and that the student would meet the financial requirements at that time.

In the past, some colleges would not accept parent-issued diplomas for students because they could not add federal and state aid to financial aid packages for those students. However, for the past several years, the federal government has accepted self-certification of graduation for homeschoolers to receive federal grants and loans. Therefore, this is no longer a concern for financial aid or admissions purposes.

For more information on PHEAA grants and college financial aid, see www.catholichomeschoolpa.org/

highschool.html.

Can my student graduate early?

Definitely, yes. Graduation may take place at any time of the year although students who wish to participate in the Baccalaureate Mass and Commencement Exercises sponsored by this network must wait for that till June. If the student has completed the graduation requirements in less time, early graduation is also possible. However, *some* state-recognized diploma programs do not permit taking less than four years to graduate or doing more than one year's worth of work in one year. Typically though, all diploma options permit early graduation.

The only problems with early graduation are these:

1. Some students may be academically ready to graduate early but may not have their life plans in order.
2. Some students may not have the maturity to go away to college or take on some other aspect of post-secondary life or work at an earlier age.
3. The Public School Code states that students may not graduate under the age of 17 unless the student "holds a certificate of graduation from a regularly accredited senior high school." Those students who receive a diploma from Seton Home Study School, which has multiple accreditations, might be able to argue their case better than others at this point. However, there is a difference between a "full-service curriculum provider" or a "diploma program" and a "senior high school" so this is not yet clear. "Regular accreditation", however, always entails a separate organization scrutinizing the facilities as well as procedures of the diploma granting organization. To our knowledge, "regular accreditation" never is granted to the students by the same educational organization that issues the diploma.
4. Since colleges do not offer 180 days of classes or 990 hours of classroom instruction in two semesters, homeschooled students who graduate before age 17 are often considered to be truant unless taking some kind of coursework at home that would then meet the days or hours requirement for instruction. Although for recording days or hours for home education will include both instruction time and study time because the 'teacher' is available for both, that is not the case with college classes. Those who graduate before age 17 and do not go on to college possibly could encounter even more trouble. However, this is a form of discrimination that state level homeschool leaders would like to see changed in the law.

Will my children miss out on a graduation ceremony?

Absolutely not. Each year in June this network sponsors a Baccalaureate Mass and Commencement Exercises. Many families come back year after year with their children because it is such a memorable experience which brings closure, celebration and recognition to the 8- and 12-graders for their accomplishments and hard work. It also allows the parents the opportunity to see their years of labor and sacrifice being acknowledged.

After the Baccalaureate Mass, the Commencement Exercises include the playing of Pomp and Circumstance as they process into the room and onto the stage of the parish hall. At this ceremony, the twelfth-grade students wear a cap and gown while eighth-grade students wear only a graduation cap. This reduces the cost to families and allows all graduates the opportunity to shift their tassel when the graduating class is formally introduced after the conferring of diplomas. All senior graduates are given the option, but are not required, to give a speech or perform a talent. There are other special moments during the ceremony which is attended by family, friends and relatives. Even students who have participated just to please their parents have found that they get as much, if not more, enjoyment out of the event as their parents do.

Who gives the students their diplomas and where do they get them?

At the above Commencement Exercises the parents are the ones who confer the diplomas upon the students. These diplomas may come from a full-service curriculum provider, a state-recognized diploma program, a GED, the parents may issue their own diploma to the student or any other source. For those parents who desire a parent-issued diploma, a very professional and beautiful cover and certificate is made available through this network for these graduates.

For more information on homeschooling high schoolers and getting into college, see www.catholichomeschoolpa.org/highschool.html.

PRIVATE TUTORING LAW

Can I hire a homeschool mom to teach my children?

Yes and no. There is no restriction upon having a private teacher for music lessons, a coach for sports, other parents teaching at a homeschool co-op, etc. If you can find a person(s) willing to teach your children, you can hire him/her/them to home educate your child, especially in one or several subject areas. However, those individuals may not be the supervisors of the home education program.

The supervisor of the home education program is limited to the parent, guardian, or person having legal custody of the child(ren). A person hired to teach your students full-time would be a private tutor and is required to be a certified teacher. This certified teacher is limited to teaching the students of one family other than his/her own children and must receive ‘a fee *or* other consideration.’ Typically, hiring full-time private tutors is cost prohibitive to most families and most certified teachers prefer to teach only the subject or grade level in which they are certified. Also most home educating parents who are certified teachers usually do not have the time to teach all of the subjects to all of the students in another family other than their own.

Can I privately tutor my own children?

The Private Tutoring Law reads as follows:

“Regular daily instruction in the English language, for the time herein required, by a properly qualified private tutor, shall be considered as complying with the provisions of this section. For the purposes of this section, “properly qualified private tutor” shall mean a person who

- *is certified by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to teach in the public schools of Pennsylvania;*
- *who is teaching one or more children who are members of a single family;*
- *who provides the majority of the instruction to such child or children;*
- *and who is receiving a fee or other consideration for such instructional services.*
- *No person who would be disqualified from school employment by the provisions of subsection (e) of section 111 [those who have committed certain criminal offenses] may be a private tutor, as provided for in this section.”* (Section 1327, bullets added for ease of reading, emphasis ours)

Although there is no reason for a parent to be prevented from using this provision with his/her own children, there are some school districts which give parents a very difficult time about using this provision.

What kind of paperwork is required of a private tutor?

“The private tutor must file a copy of his Pennsylvania certification and the required criminal history record with the student’s district of residence superintendent.” (Section 1327) Besides the teaching certificate and Act 34 Criminal Clearance, it is recommended that the private tutor include a one-time letter stating that until further notice the listed students will be privately tutored and that the district will be notified if those arrangements change.

Because they are being taught by a certified teacher, privately tutored students are not required to file affidavits or have portfolios evaluated.

WHEN THERE’S A CONFLICT WITH THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

What if my school district is requesting more paperwork than is required by law?

Laws, rules and regulations change continually for public schools because they get funding from state and federal governments who have bureaucratic strings attached to that funding. Therefore, many districts which hassle homeschoolers do so with the presumption that we too must be equally accountable to someone else. Reminding them politely that we do not receive funding and that the requirements of our law have not changed since 1988 (with the exception of access to public school extra-curriculars) often resolves things for busy office staff who do not monitor changes in our law. Remember that public school staff sometimes are not intending to be heavy handed; thus, a well informed but polite letter or phone call is often the only contact necessary to resolve such conflicts. If not resolved, contact your state representative, state senator, your family attorney, Home School Legal Defense Association if you are a member, the Alliance Defense Fund, and/or this state network.

What if I have a conflict with my school district?

When there is a difference of opinion, there are a few things to keep in mind.

When this is your first contact with an otherwise friendly or unknown school district or new district personnel:

- If at any time you believe an attorney is needed immediately, skip all other steps and go right to your attorney AND state representative and state senator.

- ❑ Contact home education leaders (local or state leaders) or other families in the school district for information on how this may be handled and to make sure that you have your facts straight.
- ❑ Be polite. Even if the district personnel sound rude or mean presume that there was no ill intent unless they prove otherwise. You never know what else someone may be dealing with in life that really is not intended to be directed at you.
- ❑ Remember that the state and federal government keep the public schools busy with new laws, policies, procedures, regulations and paperwork all the time. They are not able to put the time into studying the home education law as well. Be understanding of their situation and politely let them know that you understand how it must be for them to handle all of these things, but:
 - ❑ The Home Education Law has not changed regardless of what has happened in public school law.
 - ❑ Clarify for them whatever aspect of the law they seem to misunderstand.
 - ❑ Send them a letter, if necessary, noting the sections of the law and what it says.
 - ❑ Reassure them that you are a law abiding citizen who wants the best for your children and that you will definitely comply with the law as it is written.
 - ❑ Refrain from getting emotional and upset. Stick to the facts and the wording of the law.

Remember that you are not trying to compete, nor trying to compare, but trying to comply.

Often this is enough to settle things with the district. If things are not resolved in this manner, then consider whether, under the particular circumstances, you need to give the district time to rectify the situation. If not, then move onto the next suggestions.

When this is a district which has not resolved things based upon the law, then:

- ❑ If at any time you believe an attorney is needed immediately, skip all other steps and go right to your attorney AND state representative and state senator.
- ❑ Contact your state representative and state senator. Ask them to intervene for you as they are the caretakers of the law, and they need to know what needs clarification and with what aspects of the law the districts are not complying. If that doesn't resolve the matter, then:
- ❑ Contact state and/or local home education leaders who might have other information on what may be done at this point.
- ❑ Contact Home School Legal Defense Association if you are a member, or call the Alliance Defense Fund, the Rutherford Institute, or your family attorney.

The bottom line though is to remember that you are not trying to compete, nor trying to compare, but trying to comply. Over the years of home education gaining respect and proving itself along with districts seeing awesome portfolios, some districts feel as though they are in competition with or being compared to home education. Without any unpleasant contact with families, this alone can create hostility between districts and home educators.



More often than not you will need to remain calm and factual to not feed into the problem. This can be difficult if the district is threatening your and/or your children. By the way, we strongly advise not taking your children with you to the school district as sometimes we do receive reports of district personnel speaking inappropriately and threateningly to the children. There is no reason to expose your children to such unprofessional behavior.

Can my district file truancy charges against me?

As long as your paperwork is filed properly, truancy is not supposed to be used against home educators. The proper procedure is to use due process which is only to challenge whether or not an appropriate education is taking place. There are no procedures in the law for challenging a family when paperwork is incomplete or not to the liking of the district. However, some districts will try this because it is intimidating to the family and can include fines of up to \$300 per day. Due process is much more costly to the district; however, this is the only challenge provided for in the Home Education Law.

How do I know when to give in to the requests of the district?

Most of the time, parents will use the law as the determining factor. However, some hostile districts will make more and more requests for documentation regardless of how much you over comply with the paperwork

requirements of the law. Some districts grow to expect everyone to over comply and harass those who do not. At other times everyone is treated as though they never quite meet the expectations of the public school district. In such a case, it may be necessary to contact an attorney (such as the Alliance Defense Fund, Home School Legal Defense Association, or the Rutherford Institute) and/or your state representative or state senator in order to bring the harassment to an end. Such harassment often is less likely to occur if all families in the district are not habitually over complying by submitting excessive private academic records of the students to the public school district. With all of the history of home education now available, with the state's statistics not justifying the harassment of home educators and verifying the success of home education, and with all of the national acknowledgement of that success in the media, harassment of home education families and demands of more documentation are not the least bit justified.

Additionally, the more documentation that districts receive, the more they will compare the performance of home-educated students to their own. Such overexposure to the successes of home-educated students can frustrate public school personnel resulting in hostility toward this valid and legal educational option. It also creates a growing disregard for the privacy of student documentation as district personnel peruse student portfolios seeking ideas for their own classroom without proper authorization or respect for those private academic records. National research as well as statistics produced by the PA Department of Education verify the fact that home educating parents are law-abiding citizens who take their responsibility as educators very seriously and perform their duties admirably and with tremendous results.

SUPPORT GROUPS AND CO-OPS

I am getting ready to begin homeschooling my children, but I don't have a co-op to join. Does this mean that I cannot homeschool?

There is absolutely no legal requirement to be a part of a co-op or a support group.

What is the difference between a support group and a homeschool co-op?

A homeschool co-op is 1) a co-operative effort run by a group of families, 2) either all of the same faith or all of different faiths, and 3) for the purpose of having some classes or activities together. A support group helps the parents with encouragement, answers to questions, and sometimes more. It is covered more in the next question.

Often this is also referred to as a 'gym day' or it could include major academic subjects. They may meet once a month or as often as once a week. Some co-ops have both the need and resources (volunteers, location, etc.) to offer courses such as foreign languages, high school science classes, sports teams, and more. Most co-ops require that the parents of children who participate will contribute both financially towards materials, facility rental, and other expenses as well as teaching, clean up, or some other work to keep the co-op running.

The Home Education Law does not address this type of support system. However, regardless of how much the co-op may resemble an institutional school environment, parents must comply with the Home Education Law or private-tutoring law unless the co-op becomes a recognized and registered school with the state.

We do caution families when registering for classes at non-Catholic co-ops. In some co-op classes may be geared towards anti-Catholicism such as classes dealing with the Protestant Reformation. Some teachers may consider the co-op to be a Protestant evangelization opportunity regardless of the subject matter. However, in some areas there are enough Catholic families who are able and willing to do this on their own.

Another word of caution is that not all children in the family or in the group may need, want or have the desire, time or money to do this. Sometimes families are already established with another source for art or music, or they might be active in community sports or dance or gymnastics classes to fulfill the physical education requirement. Do not feel forced to participate in something because 'everyone else is doing it.' Only participate in what is beneficial for your children at that time. Also often the parents must teach a class or assist in a class if their students participate. Time spent preparing classes for other people's children is time not spent on whatever else you have planned for your own children's education for that year. Parents of infant children often find this difficult. Remember always to put your own children first as this is your daily duty.

Although a co-op may give some students an opportunity to be competitive, it may not be available or may not be best for other students in the family. Some families who use full-service curriculum providers, have older students with more demanding curriculum, have aging or sick relatives or family members to take care of, have children active in many other activities outside of school hours, or moms with new babies often find that their day is full enough without a co-op to complicate things. In other families though it can lift some of the burden.

Participation in a co-op might be helpful for only a period of time. Once it becomes more of a burden than a benefit, then it is time to reconsider participation for as long as that situation exists. Some parents find that they get much more accomplished at home when they are not putting time into teaching other people's children or dealing with the schedules set by another outside source. If you have found the right teaching/learning style that works for your children, the co-op might not use the same one(s). Children who left school because other students were distracting them from their academic focus may not do well in this environment either. Given some time to mature, that could change. However, co-ops do meet infrequently so it might still work for some of those students anyway.

The bottom line is not to rush into it and consider whether this will create an honest benefit or burden for your student or family at this time. We recommend getting acclimated to your own home education program first, even if you are seeking ideas from others, before venturing out to other activities or classes with a group. Too many new things at once can overwhelm, confuse, and frustrate the family.

What type of support should I be looking for?

The most important type of support is connecting with others parents. This may mean a Mom's Night Out or it may be couples getting together so that the dads have an opportunity to connect as well. Both mothers and fathers need to have their questions answered first. In Pennsylvania, too often that requires getting answers to questions on the Home Education Law. Please pray that this law can be simplified so that more time, energy, and effort can be put into the children's education rather than studying this law. Once parents have their own questions answered, they will gain confidence in themselves and trust in Divine Providence that their children will be properly educated. Success in home education begins with the parent who needs to have an excitement and confidence which the students will imitate and acquire.

First, determine the type of support that you need. Be realistic and honest about what is and is not a need. Usually this means connecting with other parents first. Once you find parents you connect with, you can work on getting the children together. Second, determine if something already exists elsewhere that would fit your needs. Thirdly, if there is nothing else already available, determine what additional needs your family or others might need. Next, find out how many other families you can locate who have the same need and if they are willing to help make it a reality. Sometimes ideas are just ahead of their time so you must wait. Sometimes it is necessary to 'think outside of the box.' For instance, sports teams may be community teams rather than homeschool teams. Evening classes at a building supply store or home improvement projects for your family or friends may be better than having a co-op working on those projects. Finally, if the "need" isn't falling into place or seems to have limited need, then put the entire idea into God's hands so He can give it back to you when the timing is right.

Another type of excellent support is the Annual Catholic Homeschool Conference & Curriculum Fair held in Harrisburg each April. This is a great opportunity to 'recharge your batteries', meet other parents, see curriculum materials in person, and acquire other supplemental materials.

Should we do field trips with others?

Some families find that field trips are a great opportunity to get dad involved in the children's education. Please note that field trips can occur on weekends, holidays, in the summer, and over the traditional Christmas vacation. Whenever Dad is available for such field trips, they can count as a school day.

Some locations for field trips lend themselves to groups, such as companies which may not want to take staff time to bring numbers of families through their facilities one at a time. Check with the company or location to see if your family size is sufficient to be added into another touring group or toured by yourselves. Some homeschool families are large enough to be a manageable group all by themselves.

If the purpose of the trip is to educate your children in depth into a topic, it might be best not to go with a group. This is especially true if your children will want to socialize with other children, may be unable to focus and be distracted by others, or might be too shy to ask intelligent questions in the presence of others. Use your own discretion and discernment about what is best for your children.

Determine first the purpose of the field trip and what you want your own children to get out of it. It might be that a purely social purpose is best and would be better to plan even if only with one other family. Such social opportunities are nice for parents as well since the children are more easily managed in smaller numbers and parents have a better opportunity to chat when the group of adults is smaller as well. If, however, the group field trip is one that works for your family or for that trip location or project idea, by all means join in with others or invite others to come along with you.

If we get together with other families, should we have a newsletter, website, email list, or group name?

There is never a need to formalize something that does not require it. The Catholic principle of subsidiarity would dictate not making things more burdensome or complicated than necessary. If the need arises over time, these things may be discussed as a group at that time. However, there is never a need to have the group become more work to you or others than necessary. Remember that the focus should be on the education of your children, not on the group.

If the group gets large enough that any of these are necessary, remember to keep it simple and uncomplicated. The best groups never burden families, never become cliques, and never impose requirements or obligations on anyone. Be realistic and admit when it's time for a break, a change of pace, a change of direction, or when honest agreement is needed before moving forward. If you use someone's home, be sure not to put all of the burden on one mom or family.

Where should we get together?

Usually it is best for moms to begin getting together in someone's home or at a restaurant. Some libraries have community meeting rooms. Many parishes are struggling to keep their schools going and feel that they are compromising their financial obligation and perceived loyalty if homeschoolers meet at their facilities. Sometimes groups get too big and need to break into smaller groups with only those events that warrant it being done as a whole. Be logical and considerate of others and their ideas and opinions. Playgrounds or parks are good for activities to get large and small groups of children together. The number of people, ages of the children, the purpose of the gathering, and the cost, if any, will determine the best location. Throughout the state and the country, families meet at various types of locations.

We hope that this Guide has been helpful to you and your family. May you and your family find home education to be a blessing from God upon all involved which will overflow into all areas of your lives and down through the generations.



When the Saints Go Marching In-Oh, How I want to be in that Number- When the Saints Go Marching In!

